

The Effectiveness of Schemes to Enable Households at Risk of Domestic Violence to Remain in their Own Homes

Research summary

This summary presents the key findings of a study conducted on behalf of Communities and Local Government (CLG) by the Centre for Housing Policy, working in association with the Centre for Criminal Justice, Economics and Psychology, at the University of York on the effectiveness of schemes to enable households at risk of domestic violence to remain in their own homes.

The summary begins by setting out the background to the research, the history of Sanctuary Schemes and the potential benefits of such interventions. It goes on to describe the research aims and methods and then presents the key findings from the study. Finally, the summary presents some good practice points which have been developed into a good practice guide on Sanctuary Schemes.

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Background to the Research: Domestic Violence and Homelessness Prevention

The government definition of domestic violence is: 'Any incident of threatening behaviour, violence or abuse (psychological, physical, sexual, financial or emotional) between adults who are or have been intimate partners or family members, regardless of gender or sexuality.'

Domestic violence accounts for 16 to 25 per cent of all recorded violent crime and costs the various agencies that deal with it in excess of £23 billion a year (Home Office, 2005)¹. It occurs across society, regardless of age, gender, race, sexuality, wealth and geography. However, it consists mainly of violence by men against women and, on average, almost two women are murdered by a current or former partner every week, and 32 men were murdered by a current or former partner during 2008/09 (Smith et al, 2010)². Domestic violence also has an impact on the children who witness it, and these children are over-represented among those referred to statutory Children and Family teams because of concerns about child abuse and neglect (see for example, Sloan, 2003)³.

In 2009, the Home Office launched its strategy on ending violence against women and girls '*Together we can end Violence against Women and Girls: A Strategy*'. This strategy identified the way in which violence against women and girls (VAWG) was to be tackled across the three main areas of prevention, provision and protection⁴. The Government has also set out its aims to ensure that every child has the chance to fulfil their potential (HM Treasury, 2003)⁵. Domestic violence is no longer to be treated as a separate

¹ Home Office (2005) Domestic Violence: a national report, London: Home Office. Available at: <http://www.crimereduction.homeoffice.gov.uk/domesticviolence/domesticviolence51.pdf>

² Smith, K et al (2010) *Homicides, Firearm Offences and Intimate Violence 2008/09: Supplementary Volume 2 to Crime in England and Wales 2008/09*. London: Home Office

³ Sloan, D. (2003) *Children in Need Census, 2003, Social Factors Survey, Domestic Violence Analysis*, Cheshire: Cheshire County Council Social Services, Performance Assurance Service. Available at: www.cheshire.gov.uk

⁴ <http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/documents/vawg-strategy-2009/end-violence-against-women?view=Binary>

⁵ H. M. Treasury (2003) *Every Child Matters*, CM5860 London: The Stationery Office. Available at:

<http://www.everychildmatters.gov.uk/files/EBE7EEAC90382663E0D5BBF24C99A7AC.pdf>

area but, rather, mainstreamed and integrated throughout the children's agenda (Home Office, 2005)⁶.

Domestic violence is a major cause of statutory homelessness. Homelessness statistics show that domestic violence is consistently reported as the main reason for loss of settled home for around 13 per cent of homelessness acceptances in England⁷. Households at risk of domestic violence often have to leave their homes because it is unsafe for them to remain there. Whilst women's refuges or temporary local authority accommodation can provide safe places for households fleeing domestic violence, many women and children find living in such accommodation stressful (see for example, Fitzpatrick *et al.*, 2003)⁸. Further, households may have to spend long periods in temporary accommodation before being rehoused. The move to new settled accommodation can also be disruptive, entailing a change of school and health services as well as a move away from support networks (see, for example, Pleace *et al.*, 2008)⁹. Households may then also live in fear of the perpetrator tracking them down to their new address.

Recent developments in countering homelessness due to domestic violence have occurred within the context of a wider drive towards a more pro-active, interventionist focus on preventing homelessness (CLG, 2005)¹⁰. All local authorities have been encouraged to develop interventions designed to enable households at risk of domestic violence, where appropriate and acceptable to the household, to stay in their own homes. These interventions are usually known as 'Sanctuary Schemes'.

Sanctuary Schemes are multi-agency, victim centred initiatives designed to enable households at risk of domestic violence to remain safely in their own accommodation and reduce repeat victimisation through the provision of

⁶ Home Office (2005) *Domestic Violence: a national report*, London: Home Office. Available at: <http://www.crimereduction.homeoffice.gov.uk/domesticviolence/domesticviolence51.pdf>

⁷ This is reported as violent relationship breakdown with a partner. See <http://www.communities.gov.uk/housing/housingresearch/housingstatistics/housingstatisticsby/homelessnessstatistics/livatables/>

⁸ Fitzpatrick, S., Lynch, E., Goodlad, R. with Houghton, C. (2003) *Refuges for Women, Children and Young People in Scotland*, Edinburgh: Scottish Executive.

⁹ Pleace, N., Fitzpatrick, S., Johnsen, S., Quilgars, D. and Sanderson, D. (2008) *Statutory Homelessness in England: The experience of families and 16-17 year olds*, London: Communities and Local Government.

¹⁰ Home Office (2005) *op cit.*

enhanced security measures and support, where it is their choice and where the perpetrator does not live in the accommodation.

A Sanctuary is a property where security measures have been installed in order that households at risk of domestic violence are able to remain safely in their own accommodation if they choose to do so. A Sanctuary may also include a Sanctuary Room, if risk assessment suggests this is an appropriate option. A Sanctuary Room is created by replacing a door to a main room, often the bedroom, with a solid core door. The Sanctuary Room door is reversed to open outwards; the frame is reinforced and additional locks and bolts and a door viewer are fitted. This provides a safe room from where household members can call and wait safely for the police.

Although there are no current national figures on the number of Sanctuary Schemes in England, evidence suggests that they are widespread. A survey of homelessness prevention conducted in 2007 found that about half of England's councils (171 of 354) were operating such schemes (CLG, 2007)¹¹.

Research aims and methods

The main purpose of the research was to provide firm evidence on the effectiveness of schemes which are intended to enable households at risk of violence to remain safely in their homes. The key aims of the study were to:

- evaluate a range of schemes which enable households at risk of domestic violence to remain safely in their own homes
- identify, based on firm evidence, what factors are key to ensuring this is a safe and sustainable option for households at risk of domestic violence
- highlight examples of good practice in the provision of such schemes and gather evidence on their cost benefits; and,
- update existing non-statutory guidance for local authorities on setting up a Sanctuary Scheme, and make recommendations to CLG as to good practice in the provision of these schemes.

¹¹ CLG (2007) *Homelessness Statistics June 2007 and Local Authority Survey of Homelessness Prevention*, London: Communities and Local Government.

The research comprised five elements:

- interviews with key national stakeholders
- selection of case study areas
- interviews with service providers and relevant agencies in case study areas
- analysis of monitoring data and other relevant documentation; and,
- interviews with households (including children) using, and who had used, Sanctuary Schemes.

Key findings

The origins and operation of Sanctuary Schemes in the case study areas

Across the case study areas similar reasons were given for introducing Sanctuary Schemes. These included:

- housing pressures
- homelessness prevention
- a more effective response to significant levels of domestic violence
- cost savings
- the provision of more choice for households fleeing domestic violence; and,
- meeting the expressed needs and preferences of households fleeing domestic violence, including the desire to remain in their homes, to minimise disruption and to avoid having to move to unfamiliar and possibly less desirable areas.

Concerns about Sanctuary Schemes at the development stage included:

- the cost of running the service; and,
- the appropriateness of Sanctuary Rooms.

The lead agencies responsible for the Sanctuary Scheme were housing providers or specialist domestic violence services, sometimes working in partnership.

In some areas specialist domestic violence services or multi-agency domestic violence partnerships were responsible for co-ordinating the service whilst other Sanctuary Schemes employed a full time specialist Sanctuary Scheme co-ordinator. In a few areas the Sanctuary Scheme was co-ordinated by housing officers.

Sanctuary schemes as a housing option

Across the case study areas, Sanctuary was offered as one housing option. The other accommodation options for households fleeing domestic violence were similar across the case study areas and included: a homelessness assessment; management transfers; refuge accommodation; emergency and temporary housing; private sector leases; rent deposit schemes, and mutual exchanges. Service users across the case study areas learned about Sanctuary Schemes from a wide range of agencies, but mainly from the police and specialist domestic violence services.

In general, referral processes worked effectively and the criteria for referral to Sanctuary Schemes were very simple:

- the household had to be resident in the local authority area (or about to be rehoused in the area because of domestic violence); and,
- the household had to be at risk of or experiencing domestic violence.

There was no evidence that service users were pressured into accepting a Sanctuary. Some service users found it difficult to remember the options they were offered but all reported that they wished to remain in their homes.

Service users chose Sanctuary for several reasons, but key amongst these were: the desire to stay in their homes and to minimise disruption; their negative perceptions of alternative options including hostels, refuges and temporary accommodation; and the possibility of being rehoused in a less desirable property and/or area.

Risk assessment and installation of Sanctuary measures

Sanctuaries were thought to be potentially appropriate for all groups and types of household which met the referral criteria. However, the suitability of a Sanctuary would be dependent on a full risk assessment and the needs and preferences of the household.

Risk assessments were usually undertaken by several agencies working together. These could include: Sanctuary Scheme workers and/or specialist domestic violence workers; police and fire services.

The risk assessment process varied slightly between areas and also differed depending on which agency referred the case but in general it comprised two main elements:

- an assessment of the case including the needs and preferences of clients and the danger posed by the perpetrator (for example, the whereabouts of the perpetrator, the level of violence and nature of incidents); and,
- an assessment of the property and its suitability for Sanctuary.

The time taken to install Sanctuary measures varied between a few days and 73 days. However, in most areas, interim security measures such as lock changes and extra locks and Home Link alarms¹² could be installed within a few hours if necessary.

There was no 'typical' Sanctuary. The types of installation depended on the degree of risk, the needs of the service user and the type or condition of the property.

Sanctuary Schemes had varied experiences of working with private tenants and owner occupiers, but most had done so successfully.

Support for households living in a Sanctuary

Most agency respondents felt that Sanctuary should be one element in a package of measures to support households at risk of domestic violence. However, in practice this did not always appear to be the case. In some areas agency representatives were concerned that Sanctuary Schemes were not referring service users to support services.

Although most service users said that they had been offered support and appreciated this, there was evidence of unmet need among service users. A few service users in some case study areas reported that they had had no follow up contact from the Sanctuary Scheme once Sanctuary measures had been installed.

¹² A Home Link Alarm connects directly to the Police or to a care control centre.

Service users had varying levels of need; whilst many required little support once they had Sanctuary measures installed, others required more intensive and extensive support.

The types of support required included: practical and emotional support with domestic violence related problems; general support, such as tenancy sustainment and debt management; and, in a few cases, support with mental health and substance misuse problems.

It was clear that service users' needs should be fully assessed and that they should be reassessed at regular intervals.

In most areas there was a shortage of specialist services, in particular for children, and a lack of capacity in existing services.

The effectiveness of Sanctuary

Most agency respondents and service users felt that Sanctuaries were successful in meeting their main aim of providing a safe alternative for households. However, few Sanctuary Schemes were able to provide data beyond immediate outcomes.

The type of installations and security measures installed differed both between and within case study areas; in the absence of detailed data on outcomes associated with different types of installations it is difficult to draw firm conclusions about the relative merits of different types of Sanctuary measures.

There was some variation in the way Sanctuary Schemes operated, in particular in terms of the support offered and provided to service users; the extent to which Sanctuary Schemes monitored service users' progress; and, though to a lesser degree, the time taken to install Sanctuary measures. Nevertheless, respondents in all areas reported similar outcomes and, for the most part, service users reported positive experiences.

Sanctuaries were also perceived as a success in terms of the wider benefits for households, in particular minimising disruption and providing more choice.

Benefits reported by agency respondents included: cost savings; a reduction in homelessness caused by domestic violence; and a reduction in repeat incidences of domestic violence.

Cost benefit analysis suggests that Sanctuaries can be cost effective and generate significant financial savings, in particular due to a reduction in

incidents of domestic violence and from preventing homelessness related to domestic violence.

Across the case study areas, service users and agency respondents reported that perpetrators had made attempts to gain entry to Sanctuary properties. Only two Sanctuary Schemes and one service user reported cases where a Sanctuary had been breached. This suggests that Sanctuary measures were generally successful in preventing repeat incidents of domestic violence for individual households.

In cases where Sanctuary proved not to be safe and/or sustainable, agency respondents reported that households would be offered the full range of accommodation options available to any household at risk of domestic violence.

There were a number of barriers to the effectiveness of Sanctuary Schemes across the case study areas. These included the problem of people feeling or being unsafe outside the home. Some agency respondents also felt that service users' reluctance to pursue legal remedies was a barrier to the effectiveness of Sanctuary Schemes.

Main conclusions

Overall Sanctuary Schemes were thought to have been successful in their main aim of providing a safe alternative for households at risk of domestic violence, and preventing the disruption associated with homelessness. Most service users said they felt much safer following the installation of Sanctuary measures although there was some evidence that a few households had moved from their Sanctuary because they did not feel safe. However, few Sanctuary Schemes were able to provide detailed information about the sustainability of Sanctuaries beyond immediate outcomes.

As the types of installation and security measures used differed both between and within case study area, and in the absence of detailed information on outcomes for individual households, it is difficult to draw firm conclusions about the relative merits of different types of Sanctuary installation.

There was also some variation in the way Sanctuary Schemes operated following installation, in particular in terms of the support offered and provided to service users; the extent to which Sanctuary Schemes monitored service users' progress; and, though to a lesser degree, the time taken to install

Sanctuary measures. Nevertheless, respondents in all areas reported similar outcomes and, for the most part, service users reported positive experiences.

Good practice points

The key findings and recommendations from the research have been developed to produce a good practice guide, *Sanctuary Schemes for Households at Risk of Domestic Violence: Practice Guide for Agencies Developing and Delivering Sanctuary Schemes*. This will be published alongside the full research report, *The Effectiveness of Schemes to Enable Households at Risk of Domestic Violence to Remain in their Own Homes: A research report* (Jones *et al.*, 2010). Some selected points are outlined below.

Developing and operating Sanctuary Schemes

1. Local authorities, agencies and organisations wishing to develop a Sanctuary Scheme should nominate a Sanctuary Scheme co-ordinator who should take overall responsibility for bringing together key agencies.
2. Sanctuary Scheme co-ordinators should have specialist knowledge of domestic violence.
3. Key agencies, for example, housing providers; specialist domestic violence services; the police; and fire service representatives, must be involved in all stages of the development of a Sanctuary Scheme. Setting up a service can take some time, but this is necessary to ensure that the views and concerns, in particular safety concerns, of all agencies responsible for delivering the service are considered and addressed.
4. Agencies developing Sanctuary Schemes must consider how the Sanctuary service will operate as part of a package of measures to support service users and to prevent further incidents of domestic violence.
5. Sanctuaries are relatively cheap and can be installed quite quickly and demand for the service is likely to be high. It is therefore most important to ensure that there is sufficient provision and that existing services have the capacity to support Sanctuary Scheme users.
6. There is a need for clarity about the responsibility for funding Sanctuary Schemes, and Scheme partners should consider which agencies may accrue benefits as a result of the Scheme. There are a number of options

available in terms of funding Sanctuary Schemes including for example: the homelessness prevention fund or an 'invest to save' approach; Area Based Grants¹³; Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships/Community Safety Partnerships; and, the police.

7. Agency representatives involved in delivering Sanctuary services (including workers responsible for installing the Sanctuary measures) should undertake training in order to improve their understanding of domestic violence.
8. Attention must be paid to the assessment of support needs and safety planning at the development stage. It should also be clear which agency will be responsible for conducting these assessments. It is recommended that all agencies adopt standardised tools for assessing need and developing personal safety plans.

SANCTUARY AS A HOUSING OPTION

9. Sanctuary should be offered as one housing option. Agencies must ensure that they fully explain all accommodation options to clients, including the options available should Sanctuary prove inappropriate.
10. All households which might benefit from a Sanctuary should be referred to the service. The decision about the appropriateness of Sanctuary should be made by Sanctuary Scheme workers in conjunction with the client and key partners.
11. Sanctuary Schemes should also accept self-referrals.

Risk assessment and installing Sanctuary measures

12. The risk assessment of the case should be co-ordinated by a Sanctuary Scheme worker and include input from all relevant agencies, in particular the police and specialist domestic violence services.
13. Property risk assessments should be undertaken jointly by a Sanctuary Scheme worker; the Crime Prevention Officer and a representative from the fire service. The risk assessment should also take account of the service user's needs and preferences.

¹³ For more information on Area Based Grants, see:
<http://www.communities.gov.uk/localgovernment/localgovernmentfinance/areabasedgrant/>

14. The type of Sanctuary measures installed should depend on the level of risk, the needs of the service user and the type or condition of the property and be decided jointly by the key agencies responsible for assessing the property and the case.
15. In cases where the perpetrator is still living in the property, Sanctuary Schemes should work with the household to help remove the perpetrator or refer the client to an appropriate agency.
16. Sanctuary Schemes should have clear and achievable targets for the time taken to install Sanctuary measures. Where cases are urgent then security measures should be installed within a few days.
17. Where it is not possible to install the full Sanctuary measures quickly or where the service user is at risk but does not wish to leave the property, interim safety measures should be implemented.
18. Sanctuary Schemes should seek to promote their service to private landlords and Registered Social Landlords in the area.

Support for households living in a Sanctuary

19. Sanctuary Schemes should be part of a holistic package of measures to support households at risk of domestic violence. Although some service users may require minimal support beyond the safety measures Sanctuary Schemes can provide, needs will vary.
20. All Sanctuary Scheme service users should have a full needs assessment. Where possible, this should be undertaken by a specialist domestic violence worker. If this is not possible then the person responsible for conducting the needs assessment should have undertaken domestic violence training.
21. All Sanctuary Scheme users should have a personal support and safety plan, and this should be reassessed after the Sanctuary has been installed and at regular intervals thereafter.
22. Sanctuary Schemes should ensure that the needs of children are also assessed and should make referrals to specialist services as required.
23. Sanctuary Schemes must be aware that some service users will lack the self confidence to seek support and advice themselves and will require support and advocacy e.g. being helped to access services or being accompanied to appointments.

Ensuring the effectiveness of Sanctuary

24. Sanctuary Schemes must have policies and procedures in place to deal with cases where service users continue to feel unsafe in their properties despite the installation of Sanctuary measures.
25. Sanctuary Schemes, in conjunction with other key partners, in particular the police and specialist domestic violence services, must work with service users to develop safety plans and strategies for keeping safe outside the home.
26. Sanctuary Scheme service co-ordinators must take overall responsibility for ensuring that all elements of the Sanctuary are in place and working correctly.
27. Sanctuary Scheme co-ordinators must also take overall responsibility for ensuring that the emergency services are aware of addresses where Sanctuary measures have been installed, and what these comprise (e.g. in case specialist equipment is required to gain entry in an emergency or to ensure that the police respond immediately to calls from the property).

Monitoring and evaluation

28. In order to monitor and help evaluate their effectiveness, Sanctuary Schemes should collect routine data on, for example: the number of referrals to the service; any reasons why Sanctuaries were decided to be inappropriate; the number of Sanctuaries installed; the types of Sanctuary measures installed and the cost; the types of households using Sanctuary; and, the cost of providing support to Sanctuary users.
29. Wherever possible, services should seek to gather data on medium to longer term outcomes for households including the number of service users who were able to remain in their homes; any attempted breaches; and, any repeat incidents of domestic violence.
30. Sanctuary Schemes should also should seek to gain clients' views on the effectiveness of the Sanctuary Scheme service, including the support they receive.

Further information

The findings and recommendations both in this summary, the main report and guide are those of the contractors and do not necessarily represent those of the Department for Communities and Local Government.

The main report, based on this research, *The Effectiveness of Schemes to Enable Households at Risk of Domestic Violence to Remain in their Own Homes*, is available at:

www.communities.gov.uk/corporate/researchandstatistics/research1/researchpublications

The guide, *Sanctuary Schemes for Households at Risk of Domestic Violence: Practice Guide for Agencies Developing and Delivering Sanctuary Schemes*, is available at:

www.communities.gov.uk/corporate/researchandstatistics/research1/researchpublications

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